

Needham Human Rights Committee Minutes

May 21, 2015

Recorder: Amelia Klein

Present: Marlene Schultz, Amelia Klein, Michael Vaughn, Cynthia Ganung, Jeremy Sutherland, Ashok Mehta, Abdul Cader Asmal, John Schlittler, Zahra Haghighatjoo, Barry Ehrlich, Bud Schram

Guests: Sandra Walters, Jennifer Howard

1. Approval of Minutes

- Minutes of April 16, 2015 were approved.
- A final, edited version of the March 19, 2015 HRC minutes is to be submitted by JoAnne, who was the recorder.

2. Old Business

Committee Membership

- The Committee welcomed Zahra Haghighatjoo as a new member of the NHRC.
- The NHRC is now at full membership – a goal the Committee has diligently tried to achieve for a number of years!
- Jennifer Howard expressed interest in becoming a member. Mike Vaughn offered to resign from the Committee in order to open a position for Jennifer. Mike has been on the Committee for many years and has been a past chair. The Committee has benefited from his insight and guidance and would miss his presence. (Mike agreed to continue to attend meetings in an unofficial role.)

Webpage

- Ashok has taken major responsibility for enhancing the NHRC home page. Together with Sandy Cincotta, Ashok is creating a structure and format to include archives, an expansion of our mission statement, links, and other features. The webpage will be in line with other Town Committee/Commission webpages. Mike volunteered to work with Ashok and they will keep us up to date on their progress.

Traces of the Trade

- Due to the recent resignation of the principal of Needham High School, the Committee decided to postpone actions to plan an event until there is a change in leadership at the High School in the fall. Bud and Jeremy will then discuss plans to meet with the new principal to determine whether the *Traces of the Trade* program would be of interest to NHS students and faculty.

Follow-up to recent issue

- John Schlittler reported that he spoke with the woman of a couple involved in a situation in Needham several weeks ago. The situation that took place made the African American couple feel uncomfortable when approached by a Needham police officer. During a phone conversation, both John and the woman shared their perspectives and

addressed issues of stereotypes experienced by people of color when visiting a community in which they are a minority. John described the conversation as productive. John also had further contact with Ramin, who originally presented the incident to Chief Droney. The Committee feels strongly about seeking ways to engage the entire Needham Community in dialog about racial awareness. The co-chairs cited the book Waking Up White by Debbie Irving as a resource for Committee members.

3. Reports

Needham Immigration Justice Task Force

- The NHRC will co-sponsor an event on JUNE 8, 2015 at the Broadmeadow School. The event focuses on immigration reform and will host speaker Margaret Stock - a nationally known expert on immigration and national security laws, and a MacArthur Fellow. Jeremy will send publicity to the mailing list of the Needham Diversity Committee. The event was posted on the Town website.
- Cynthia reported on the Framingham Metrowest Worker's Center and their current work with injured workers. Falls from roofs by roofers are the biggest single area of injury. Undocumented workers are the most vulnerable labor group in this industry not only in terms of safety but wage theft. The Worker's Center is working on a bill and a wage theft campaign, and a bill for workers' compensation.

Needham Diversity Committee

- The Diversity Committee is seeking non-profit status, which will enhance opportunities for obtaining funding.
- The DC is developing a website which will promote MLK Day, on-going film series and other events planned by the DC, and provide a source to promote diversity-related events organized by other groups, such as the NHRC.
- A fall film-series is planned focusing on *Race - The Illusion of Power*.
- DC members met with the Needham Clergy Association to organize community discussions around racism.
- The next Annual Diversity Summit will take place on Saturday, October 17. The HRC discussed the possibility of organizing a break-out session at the Diversity Summit. Sandra suggested leading a dialog following a video, such as Jay Smooth's *How to Tell Someone They're Racist*. Other videos have been identified by the DC as well. The HRC discussed the possibility of pursuing Barry's conversation with a NHS faculty member about the Facing History and Ourselves curriculum in the HS, and creating opportunities for parent-child dialogue around common issues. Further discussion will take place at the June meeting.
- A motion was made and passed for the NHRC to be a co-sponsor of the 2015 Needham Diversity Summit.

Needham Schools

- Dr. Jonathan Pizzi resigned as principal of Needham High School. An investigation is pending. Jonathan Bourne, the Assistant Principal, will serve as Acting Principal until a search process is completed.

Town Issues

- John reported a growing concern in the community and the State of Massachusetts about an epidemic of drug abuse such as heroin and Opioid addiction. This is a challenge for law enforcement officials seeking drug dealers, who often sell drugs to support their own habits. Drug abuse is a serious threat to community security. The NPD has worked with the DA's office in finding seeking guidance in drug enforcement.

5. New Business

- Barry introduced the idea of *advocacy* as a pursuit for the NHRC. The Committee agreed that advocacy could be an integral part of its Charge and Mission Statement. Informing and educating the Community about key bills and legislation, for example, could motivate Community members to become actively involved in supporting relevant causes that benefit the Community. The Committee will continue to explore this concept at a future meeting.

6. Other

- The Committee was pleased to have Sandra Walters attend the May meeting after a long absence. Sandra was a former NHRC member and a co-chair. She has been an important voice in the past as a member of the Committee and we hope that she will be able to join us at future meetings!
- The June 18 meeting will be held on the third Thursday of the month, although the co-chairs will not be able to attend the meeting because of other commitments. The co-chairs will send an agenda and minutes in advance of the meeting. Jeremy agreed to chair the meeting.
- **Recorder for June 18: Barry**